

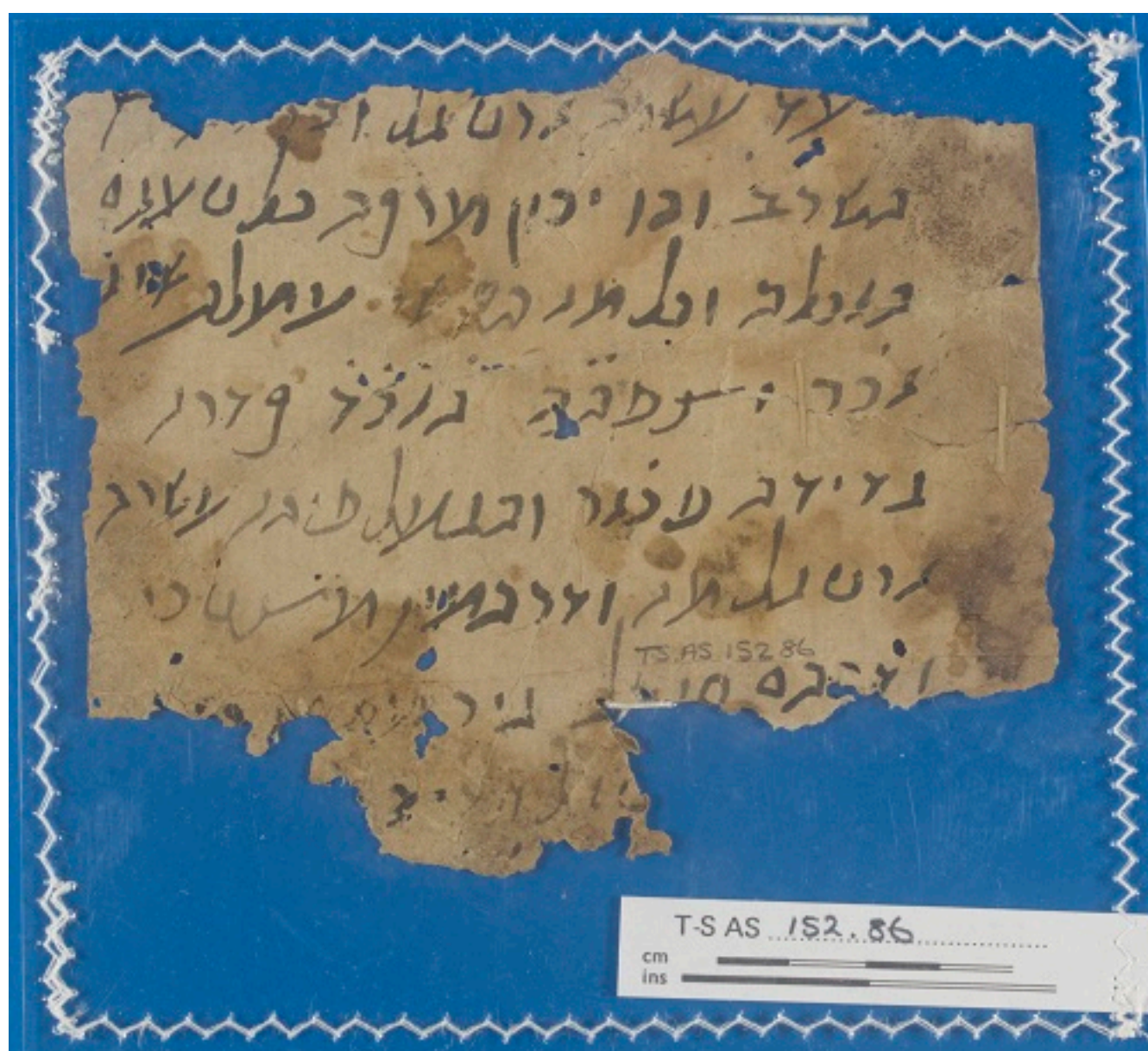
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Fragment of the Month: October 2007

A newly-discovered fragment of a letter written by Maimonides (T-S AS 152.86)

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Despite all the scholarly attention that has been paid to the Cambridge Genizah collections, it is still possible to discover little treasures. Ben Outhwaite and I were so lucky to stumble upon one of these hidden gems while working on the Additional Series. It is a fragment of a letter, an autograph of Maimonides, hitherto unpublished, which dispenses medical advice and recipes on one side while on the other he is concerned about great amounts of wood being brought by water in "a hundred ships and eighteen big ships".



The handwriting is very typical of Maimonides' letters and *responsa*. Conspicuous are the idiosyncratic forms of several letters. For example, א looks almost like *hamza* in Arabic script, see line 4 אכר or line 3 תאכלה. The ש has a very distinct form with a sharp left-side corner and the middle stroke coming out of the top of the left stroke, compare עשרה in line 1 and תשרב in line 2. Both ת and ה look like a cross between a cursive ב and a ת, see for example line 2 תשרב and line 5 גדידה, while he employs the diacritic dots to indicate Arabic *tā'*.

Maimonides was a prolific author of medical treatises and a famous physician, and here he seems to be giving advice to an acquaintance. His recipe includes lentisk and spikenard, which are both used to treat digestion problems and strengthen the heart and stomach, and iron and water. Particularly interesting is the mention of the last two ingredients in the light of another autograph from the Genizah collection, T-S Ar.44.79 "On sexual intercourse". There, Maimonides advocates the regular drinking of "iron water" as a means of strengthening all the inner organs, and, especially, of strengthening the male organ. Was he possibly helping a friend or colleague not only with advice concerning an illness but also to a happier love life with this recipe?

1. [...]ת]עד עשרה ארטאל זב[רה (?) ...]

2. תשרב והו יכון מוקת כל טעאם

3. תאכלה וכל מא ת[א]שי עמלת שיא

4. אכר וצפתה תאכד קדרא

5. גדידה פכאר ותגעל פיהא עשרה

6. ארטאל מא ודרהמיין מצטכי

7. ודרהם סנבל גיר מס[חוק] ..

8. ... (אר)טאל חדיד

1. ... (you should) prepare ten pounds of (iron?) ...

2. you should drink, and this should be timed with every meal

3. you eat, and whenever you need (?). I made another

4. thing. Its recipe (is): take a new

5. earthen pot, and put in it ten

6. pounds of water and 2 dirhams of lentisk and

7. a dirham of spikenard, [whole] not crushed ...

8. ... (po)unds of iron ...

Literature:

Lev, Efraim: *Medicinal Substances of the Medieval Levant* (in Hebrew), Tel Aviv 2002

Lev, Efraim: *Medicinal Substances in Jerusalem from Early Times to Present Day* (BAR International Series 112), Oxford 2003

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